Trial of Tijerina, 9 Followers Begins

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M., Nov. 12—The trial of Reles Lopez Tijierina began today in what the militant leader of Mexican-Americans called "just one more step in years of oppression of the Spanish people."

Tijerina and nine of his followers are charged with kidnaping—a capital offense—assault on a jail and false imprisonment of a deputy sheriff.

The charges stem from a raid Tijerina and members of the Alliance of Free City-States made on the Rio Arriba County Courthouse in the rural mountain town of Tierra Amarilla in northern New Mexico on June 5, 1967.

Tijerina insists the raid was made to make a citizens arrest of District Attorney Alfonso Sanchez and to draw national attention to the Spanish-American group's struggle for the rights to ancient Spanish land grants totaling millions of acres in the Southwest.

Sit-ins on some of the land grant sites had already brought friction between Tijerina's group and the authorities.

Sanchez was not at the courthouse and the raid got out of hand. Two men were seriously wounded, several persons were held hostage for a time and courthouse employes were herded around at gunpoint.

Sanchez, who is the focus of the anger and frustration for the poor Spanish-speaking Americans, is handling the case for the prosecution before Judge Paul Larrazolo. It probably will be his last major case. Sanchez was defeated in the Democratic primary last August.

The trial opening today was marked by lengthy legal arguments over the right of jury challenges for the defense and the prosecution.

Defense attorneys argued that each of the ten defendants was entitled to 21 challenges of potential jurors for a total of 210. Sanchez called for a total of 56 challenges.

Security at the courthouse was markedly lighter than at previous court actions involving Tijerina and his followers.

There were few uniformed police present and the audience in the courtroom was sparse, except for a number of high school civics students.

The atmosphere was so relaxed that during the noon break Tijerina and his wife Patsy sat near the prosecuting attorney at a small Spanish restaurant.

Envoy Resigns

United Press International

President Johnson yesterday accepted the resignation of Raymond L. Thurston as U.S Ambassador to the Somali Republic. Thurston, career foreign service officer, has served in the post since Sept. 1965 Thurston is retiring from the Government after 30 years service.